

find the fuel because these companies do not want to really bring it on line.

We need to change this situation. The 2002 farm bill provided the first-ever energy title as part of a farm bill in American history, promoting the production and usage of ethanol, biodiesel, and other renewable energy sources. But in recent years, instead of moving to aggressively implement these provisions, the Bush administration has consistently proposed reducing funding for these energy programs. And this is after his own energy plan failed to provide a single one of its 103 recommendations directed at programs offered by the U.S. Department of Agriculture. We have agriculture waiting, a lady in waiting, that this administration refuses to see to help America move toward energy independence.

The recently passed energy bill makes additional moves in that direction, but fails to take America in the direction fast enough to counter these massive price increases. Think about it. Oil shortages in the 1970s. Wars in the Middle East in the early 1990s and again now have the supply of oil looming as a prime motivator. Domestic shortages due to national disasters such as Katrina push up gasoline prices to a national average of more than \$3 a gallon and local prices as high as \$6 a gallon. When will we learn? When will we take control of our own fate?

I have sponsored the Biofuels Energy Independence Act of 2005, H.R. 388, to advance research, development, production, and marketing of biofuels produced from renewable sources like corn, soybeans, cellulose, and other biomass supplies. I want to again urge my colleagues to break America's addiction to imported oil right now by taking advantage of technology that is available today. Literally, we could displace one third of imported petroleum with these renewable fuels that could be produced inside our borders. All it takes is leadership. Is it not time?

ISSUES AFFECTING AMERICA IN THE AFTERMATH OF HURRICANE KATRINA

The SPEAKER pro tempore (Mr. KUHLMANN of New York). Under the Speaker's announced policy of January 4, 2005, the gentleman from Florida (Mr. MEEK) is recognized for 60 minutes as the designee of the minority leader.

Mr. MEEK of Florida. Mr. Speaker, once again it is an honor to come before the House of Representatives, and we want to thank the Democratic leader for allowing the 30-something Working Group to come to the floor once again to work on issues and talk about issues that are facing Americans in this time after Hurricane Katrina and the devastation that has taken place in the South. Also, issues that are facing everyday working Americans throughout our country that are working 30-somethings and their families. When I mention their families, I am not only

talking about 30-somethings as individuals but also their parents and their grandparents and their children and children to be.

Mr. Speaker, this working group, like I stated last week and the week before last, is a group of Members on the Democratic side of the aisle that come together on a weekly basis to talk about the issues that are facing Americans. I want to thank the Democratic leader and the gentleman from Maryland (Mr. HOYER), the Democratic whip; and also the gentleman from New Jersey (Mr. MENENDEZ), chairman of the Democratic Caucus; and the gentleman from South Carolina (Mr. CLYBURN), our vice Chair, for standing steadfast on behalf of those Americans that are in great need at this time. I would also like to thank all of the workers that are working on behalf of the Federal effort to be able to bring about some, hopefully, stability to those that are in the affected area.

Mr. Speaker, I speak from experience because I had an opportunity to travel down to Hancock County this past weekend and also to Gulfport, Mississippi, to speak with some of the residents there about some of their pain and suffering they are continuing to go through. And I know that last week I mentioned that we are in the first 2 minutes of the first quarter of their recovery process, and I will tell the Members what I saw down in Hancock County, which was one of the hardest hit areas.

Everyone knows about New Orleans, that when the storm hit New Orleans, the worst thing that happened to New Orleans was the fact that the levee broke and that those homes were flooded, and a lot of those homes have to be leveled due to the water damage and saltwater damage to those homes. But I had an opportunity to travel down there, Mr. Speaker, and I want to share some of the photos that we were able to take down there of some of the devastation that took place.

Mr. Speaker, this is actually a photo here of the Florida National Guard. I have to take my hat off to those men and women that actually went down to Hancock County, where they had a tidal surge, or storm surge, of 23 feet. We have Colonel Duren who is in between me and the gentleman from Mississippi (Mr. TAYLOR), who is a Member of this House. This is actually the gentleman from Mississippi's (Mr. TAYLOR) home that stood there and was washed away. The storm surge was actually to the top of the trees, and it was almost like a washing machine. Brick homes, wood homes, trailers, what have you, are just leveled and devastated. The gentleman from Mississippi (Mr. TAYLOR) feels that he will recover, but there are a number of stories of his neighbors and his whole neighborhood that was actually washed out.

These are members of the Florida National Guard that were with us, and they have cleared in Hancock County and Mississippi some 65 miles of roads

that needed to be cleared to help individuals put themselves back together.

This is also some devastation from the same county that is receiving very little media attention about what happened. Some buildings that have been there since the 1800s have been taken outside by Hurricane Katrina. And as the Members can see, the economy and the way of life in that particular area is going to be forever changed.

Also, we have here a middle school. I am standing there with Colonel Duren of the Florida National Guard once again. Not just because I am from Florida, but I want to thank all of the National Guard troops that are actually down there trying to be a part of the Federal response.

As the Members know, in Florida we have the special emergency response teams that have a lot of experience in the recovery process, helping people bring their lives back to normal. They are working with very little guidance, and I think I am going to make a point a little later on, Mr. Speaker, the reason why we need a commission to look at the whole Katrina experience from the beginning to the end. Some may say that a commission would bring about something similar to the 9/11 Commission with civilians, individuals that once served in this body, past first responders and present first responders, so that we will be able to avoid something like this from happening again.

This is actually a middle school here. The Florida National Guard cleaned about maybe 2 or 3 feet of mud out of this school. This is the library, where the librarian and we also met with the superintendent of schools in this county said that the librarian's goal was to have a million books in this library, and obviously she has been set back; and we will be asking Americans to not only help this school but other schools that are trying to stand up on their own two feet. All of these books were soaked, and obviously the mold and everything has set in here, and these are the setbacks that many of our young people have gone through.

The last picture I want to show here, I know FEMA has received its hard knocks and I commend not only past Director Michael Brown from stepping down from the post of FEMA because this recovery should not be about Michael Brown, it should be about FEMA doing its job, and with the appointment, the temporary appointment, of Mr. Paulson, who was the Miami-Dade County fire director, who went through Hurricane Andrew and a number of other hurricanes, we do know that he does have experience in recovery and also response. With it being very early in hurricane season, and North Carolinians and South Carolinians and Virginians looking at a possible storm hitting them now, it is important to have someone at the helm of FEMA that has some experience in dealing with natural disasters and know what to do when they happen.

This is actually a FEMA trailer here in Hancock County. I am speaking to one of the part-time workers here standing up. These are phones that are there of individuals that are coming in that are making phone calls to receive their initial \$2,000 from the Federal Government to be able to assist them with some of the basic needs. Some of these people waited at least 3 hours in the blazing sun in Mississippi. I must say it must have been about 90 degrees here, nothing that we can do anything about because they do not have the facilities to be able to go into. My hat is off to those local workers and FEMA workers.

Actually, this gentleman here in the corner of the picture, he is retired. He worked with the Firestone Rubber Company in west Maryland. I must add, and he has been down there for 8 days, and he is saying that he has been working hard in trying to make a wrong right. And many of these people like him that are working that are retired that have decided to work part time for FEMA, I think we need to take our hats off to.

We have a couple of others. But, Mr. Speaker, I think it is important that we set politics aside and allow leadership to prevail. And in the 30-something Working Group, we are very concerned about politics playing a role in not only this recovery process but being able to get down to the bottom line of what has to happen not only in the future but right now. I would ask the Members and also Americans to take a look at Time magazine talking about poverty; also talking about the issue of race in the South.

I will tell the Members that many of us watched New Orleans residents suffer for 3 days without food, without water. Some went into stores and took what they needed to be able to survive. Some left their homes with only the clothes that are on their backs.

□ 2100

I went to Mississippi, Hancock County, a lot of hard-working people, like the hard-working people of New Orleans; and there was a similar story, Mr. Speaker. I was talking with the mayor of the town, and he told me at the Big K and the Wal-Mart, they stood in front of that Wal-Mart and he told the folks, listen, go in and get what you need. Do not walk out with a DVD or whatever the case may be, but go in and get the things that you need to survive, because that is all they had. There was the threat of the fact that they may run out of food, they may run out of water, they may run out of personal items that they need to be able to survive; and so they did what they had to do. Unfortunately, they had to do that. These are law-abiding individuals, and I know in New Orleans the same thing happened.

So when we look at this situation, we have to look at how we put Americans in the position to go in and do things traditionally that they have not had to

do, individuals that woke up every day and went to work, did what they had to do to put food on the table for their families, pay for their children's education. I think it is important. A lot of children and women are affected by this storm. It did not discriminate, and I think that the question that was posed to the President, was there discrimination that played a role in the national response, I think that the future will tell if that is true or if it is not true.

I am one that believes that we can see the best of America right now. The world is watching what we do and how we do it. And regardless of the pigment of the skin of the individuals that were affected by this storm, if everyone is treated equally and as human beings, I think that it will be important for us to prove to the rest of the world, if we are the superpower of the world and we stand as a shining example of democracy, I think it is important that, through our actions and here on this House floor and in the other body and the executive branch, that we play a very strong role in making sure that those individuals that were displaced, evacuees, Americans that are in Utah, that are in my district in Miami, Florida, that are in New England, that are in Maryland, that are here in Washington, DC, in our Capital, that are in Texas, that are in Georgia, that are in the upper part of Mississippi, that we make it so, Mr. Speaker, that they will be able to come back to their homes and they will be able to claim their property and that they will be able to move in and they will be able to take part in this recovery process.

Many of the small businesses that were struggling anyway will not go back into business. We know that the SBA will try to do all they can to provide low-interest loans. We know that individuals of good will and banks have offered dollars as it relates to providing them with loans, and we know that the economy in New Orleans and throughout the Gulf Coast area are going to be suffering for some time.

I had an opportunity also to visit Gulfport, and I can tell my colleagues that I went to go see the port, and to see port containers, Chiquita Bananas, what have you, that are 5 miles down the road that destroyed homes. I am from Miami, Florida, so this is nothing that I am not used to, seeing storm damage. But when you see a storm surge, 23 feet of water, and you see a container sitting between two trees and what is left of a house wall and you wonder how it ended up there, some 4 or 5 miles away, and that is no exaggeration whatsoever; it was like a washing machine and those containers moved on down and they just literally, and the tidal surge cleared those homes and the way of life that individuals are used to seeing.

I think that it is also important that as we look at FEMA, we have to make sure that we have this independent commission. The Democratic leader,

and I must say the Democratic leader, and I may just want to say leader, she is a leader just like we have other leaders in this House on the other side of the aisle; I think we should be willing to take on the recommendations of leaders who are in this Congress, and I think we should be able to take on the recommendations of those who have been through this before.

I think that we should ask professionals to come to serve their Federal Government, just like a 9/11 Commission with subpoena powers to be able to ask the tough questions. Because the unfortunate thing that happened in this case as it relates to Hurricane Katrina is that we did have a great deal of loss of life. It may not be what some people said that it would be, but individuals have lost their lives, and we also have individuals that have been injured in this storm that go unsung. We have children who cannot find their parents at this particular time. We have sons and daughters that they are trying to locate, through the media and Internet sites, and volunteers are trying to reunite individuals, family members together.

So I think that it is worth the Federal commitment to the South that we do everything that we can. It goes far beyond our visit. Just by myself going down to Mississippi is not enough just to say I have been there. It is not like visiting Walt Disney World and saying, oh, I did go to Walt Disney World and I have been to Disneyland. That is not what this is about.

It is about us being able to not only go down to the area; and I must say, Mr. Speaker, the gentleman from California (Mr. WAXMAN) and the gentleman from Mississippi (Mr. THOMPSON), the ranking member of the Committee on Homeland Security, and others, the ranking member of the Committee on Transportation and Infrastructure has asked for a congressional visit down to the affected area, and I think that is important. I am glad the President is going there. He was down there when I was there. But this Congress has to go down and see exactly what is happening to these individuals in the South.

This Congress that will appropriate the dollars, because the President can only recommend, but this Congress needs to see firsthand the needs of those individuals that are affected. I think not only going to the affected areas, but going to see shelters that are far away from the South where these individuals have been introduced to a new community, and I want to commend those communities who have taken these evacuees, these Americans in with open arms.

But we have to go far beyond putting them in our gymnasiums and in our sports arenas and in our churches. We have to make sure that they have what they had before the storm, that is, a home with a fence, with memories, with family portraits on the wall, and a sense of community. We owe them

that. I feel as it relates to the levee, the levee there in New Orleans, the things that should have been in place, that it is important that we make them whole. I think it is important that we look at and we have an independent committee just like the Democratic leader has suggested. And I must say, Mr. Speaker, unfortunately, the Democratic leader said we should come together in a special session and send emergency appropriations to FEMA so that they can have the dollars to deal with the response.

Originally, that response back from, unfortunately, the leadership was, oh, we do not need to do that, and then a day later the President recommended it and said well, yes, it is an idea and jointly we will do that. But I think that time is of the essence and we need to put partisanship aside.

I think also as it relates to the recommendation of Director Michael Brown, obviously he was over his head on this particular issue. I personally went down last Friday and met with the hurricane center director. Michael Brown was in place, he spoke to him the day before the storm, like he spoke with the mayor of New Orleans and others. There were individuals that knew what happened and what was going to happen. So I think it is important that we look at this beyond what we read in the paper. I think it deserves the kind of attention that the 9/11 Commission was able to bring about, for not only the survivors but also the families of the 9/11 tragedy.

So if we do not do that, I think we fall short of allowing Americans not only to know the truth but to be able to have preventive action in place.

The Special Emergency Response Team from Florida is one of the best teams in the Nation with some of the best building codes in the Nation, and we are able to respond. Our National Guard automatically, they know automatically in the way they do business, when the wind drops down to 40 miles per hour, they are moving in. They are moving in before Americans or Floridians have an opportunity to even come out of the house and see what happened. They know they have a security mission; they know they have a recovery mission. This is what we need throughout the Nation. We need a Federal Government that understands that.

I am not here to say that it was totally the Federal Government. I commend the President for taking some level of responsibility for the Federal response being lackluster, at best, because Americans not only were close to starvation, but without water. And if the media can make it there, the Federal Government can make it there. If a paper was not signed or somebody did not call somebody, we knew, those of us who knew, what we had to do when we had to do it. So that is important.

I am glad that my colleague, the gentlewoman from Florida (Ms. WASSERMAN SCHULTZ), has joined me,

who knows quite a bit about hurricanes herself. We served in the State legislature together in Florida and were a part of many of the reforms in Florida after Hurricane Andrew. Now, hopefully, we will be a part of the reforms here in this Congress as we look at the Federal response in the future.

Ms. WASSERMAN SCHULTZ. Mr. Speaker, it is a pleasure to be here with my colleague once again and an honor to serve with him. I just have to commend the gentleman. I saw him when I was watching my TV coming off the plane yesterday, the gentleman's trip to tour the devastated areas and, particularly Hancock County, which I think the gentleman particularly went to with his Committee on Homeland Security colleagues to highlight that it was not just New Orleans, it was not just the ground zero area of New Orleans.

Ground Zero was actually Hancock County, and the communities there that essentially, it appears, have been forgotten, or at least neglected because they are smaller and the focus does not appear to be on them. So I was so proud of the gentleman to see him doing that. Once again, the gentleman is stepping up for people who need him. This is not, we are not here for a love fest; but it did my heart some good to know that colleagues of mine were going where their help was needed.

Mr. MEEK of Florida. Mr. Speaker, the gentlewoman was also busy making sure that our constituents were able to take advantage of the filing of her bill, and I am a cosponsor of her bipartisan bill, in forcing FEMA to make sure that those homeowners, some 300-plus in south Florida, are able to receive FEMA assistance. Many of those individuals need that assistance; and because they fall under the 800 or 400 threshold of FEMA, they have a discretionary decision to make here in allowing those families, individuals who work every day, pay taxes every day, to be able to take advantage of what the Federal Government provides.

Ms. WASSERMAN SCHULTZ. Mr. Speaker, the gentleman is right. As we discussed last week when we were putting this bill together, and we are fortunate that we have all 25 members of the Florida delegation as cosponsors, we are working together on this, this is not a partisan issue. We have some homeowners who were looking through the roof of their houses at the sky. The impact on those families in Florida is the same as the impact, without the widespread devastation, that they are feeling in the Gulf Coast States. But we wanted to make sure that Floridians do not get left behind who are suffering in the same way. I appreciate the gentleman's leadership and advice and guidance on helping to put that bill together.

One of the things that I wanted to talk about tonight is where we go from here, which is, I know, the direction that the gentleman from Florida is taking this discussion. There are some

good things that have happened, in no small part, I think, due to the things that we have been pointing out over the last 10 or so days. Leader PELOSI has rightly called for an independent commission similar to the 9/11 Commission.

Like the gentleman said, that would not be Members of Congress sitting around and talking to each other; that it would be, and certainly that would be bipartisan and would be balanced and fair, so the American people can have confidence in our emergency preparedness and disaster response system. Because of all of this that has happened in the last 2 weeks, that is what has been shaken the most. We have been building, since September 11 we have been trying to rebuild Americans' confidence in the system, because when you have the Twin Towers knocked down, that was the biggest devastation beyond, obviously, the tragedy of the 3,000 people who died there, was that America's confidence was shaken in our ability to respond to those kinds of disasters.

And it is 4 years in the making, a process that we restore confidence, we restore people's ability to believe that we have some security here. While we may have made improvements on the terrorist and international risk preparedness level, clearly the domestic preparedness level, as the President admitted today, we have a lot of work to do. Because we never can predict Mother Nature, and particularly because of where we live, we have hurricanes approaching our constituents on a regular basis, it is really disturbing.

So I am glad that Under Secretary Brown did the right thing and stepped down. We called for it a year ago with our colleague, the gentleman from Florida (Mr. WEXLER); and, quite honestly, had he done the right thing sooner than that, then perhaps we could have had a prepared expert in place who could have responded much better to the results of Katrina.

Mr. MEEK of Florida. Well, I can tell the gentlewoman that this is very, very important, being able to take these recommendations and move with them. Also, I think it is important that Members of Congress, we can travel overseas and learn from what they are doing and express our feelings to individuals as it relates to counterterrorism issues, as it relates to trade; we can definitely go right here domestically. We have a number of aircraft that are out at Andrews Air Force Base that can move Members down so that they can get firsthand experience in speaking to those Americans.

One may say, well, you do not represent those individuals. Well, I do not represent anyone in Egypt. I do not represent anyone in Europe. I do not represent anyone in other areas where we have interests, whether it be Pakistan, citizens of that country.

□ 2115

But as a Member of the U.S. Congress, I do represent Americans. Even

though I have a district, we are here, and we stick our voting card in these machines that are placed behind these chairs here voting on behalf of Americans, and they pay taxes to be able to allow us to do some of the things that we are doing throughout the world.

The least that we can do, Mr. Speaker, in my opinion, the least that we can do on behalf of these Americans, go down now, see it as it is now. Take it from me, from someone that has gone down there and has seen responders, they are going through a transition of law enforcement and first responders.

We have search and rescue that is going on in New Orleans, but much of it is now a transition into recovery, making sure that independent contractors that are traveling from as far down as Canada, United States border, and we do know some of them are well intended and some of them are coming to take advantage of making the victims victims again. And this is the reason why we need to know first hand what is going on.

When New Orleans is clean and when the gulf area is clean, as it relates to some of the debris that is there, that is in place there now, I do not think that it will serve us well if we do not see it in the way that it is now. TV just does not give it justice, in my opinion, to be able to see the sweat literally run down the side of an individual that is waiting in line to be able to receive Federal assistance.

I was there with the gentleman from Mississippi (Mr. TAYLOR), who has been down there and was there all last week, did not come up to Congress because he needed to be able to help his constituents put their lives back together. Rightfully so, he was there for him; and we did what we had to do up here, did the best that we could to make sure that appropriations came down.

But there are a number of individuals that are still suffering, a number of individuals that we have to understand as a Congress how we respond, even when it comes down to individuals that Americans that have poured their hearts out and sent not only contributions to some of the organizations but have taken it upon themselves, with their credit cards and with the gas prices now, I would say credit cards, going and filling their tanks up and driving down, not knowing anyone, but going down there to feed people, to help people, but those individuals, and for diapers and all of those things that have been sent down, being able to understand that we need volunteer coordinators from the beginning to make sure that those supplies are not spoiled or being out in the sun or being in a place where they should not be.

The little, small things like that are important for us to understand as Members of Congress.

And, Mr. Speaker, if this was allowed, because I must share not only with the Members but those of us that are in this Chamber that, you know, as a ranking member of the Oversight

Committee on Homeland Security, if I had the authority, I would do it. But, unfortunately, I am in the minority party; and we cannot authorize a congressional visit. The majority party can do that.

And I have said that to my Chair. I said that we have a responsibility to go down there. From what I understand there hasn't been an official congressional CODEL to the gulf States. Our commitment to the South is in judgment right now.

I think there are individuals, Democrats and Republicans and independents alike, and those individuals that are not even registered to vote, that are still putting out the question, where is my Federal Government?

Now I will tell you this. I ran into a young lady that said, where is my Federal Government? And she was, you know, had some water and MREs and all of those things. Yes, I can say, look at your hands, there is your Federal Government, but that is not enough in my opinion.

Here is someone that is looking for a process that we should be well practiced in, natural disasters. And I will tell you that being a member of the Homeland Security Committee, and from what I have seen of the performance of the Department, I think we are pretty well trained up on a terrorist event. But I think that natural disasters are still in the rear view mirror and is considered as an afterthought.

I am not totally prepared to say that it is important that we move FEMA outside of the Department of Homeland Security, and that is the reason why we need this commission. We need this commission to make recommendations to us here in this Congress on what we should do, how we should do it, and in a way that it could happen that will not disrupt the relationship between FEMA and the Department of Homeland Security. So that is the reason why we need it.

I will say to the gentlewoman from Florida (Ms. WASSERMAN SCHULTZ), and now our good friend, the gentleman from Ohio (Mr. RYAN), is here, that the leader said that we should go into special session immediately or come back from recess early, go into session, give FEMA energy funds. No. Then eventually it was yes, 48 hours later.

Said that Under Secretary Director Michael Brown of FEMA should step down because he is not up to par, being able to carry on, not only the future response but the initial response. Several days pass, back and forth. Okay, they sent him back to Washington. Three days later, he resigned.

She has also asked, even though the leadership has said in both House and Senate, the other body, that we should have a committee of House and Senate Members to look at this and have a press conference, just one side on, you know, Republicans there representing, saying that it is a bipartisan, but no subpoena powers, none of the teeth that we need to get down to the bottom of how can we correct it.

I commend the Democratic leader and the Democratic leadership for saying in both the House and other body that we will not participate in such a committee. Because we need to professionalize that. Even though we are professionals here, we need individuals that understand emergency management and recovery. And so that is what that is about, to be able to make sure.

And you know something, if the leadership says, fine, let us put together a commission, the President says, let us put together a commission, I am all for it. But we are wasting time. Because people are saying, well, you know, the Democrats recommended it, and we cannot do it because they are Democrats.

We are Americans, too. And I believe there are some individuals that are on the other side that believe that we should come together in time of 9/11. I think there is an opportunity for us to be able to show Americans that we can lead in a bipartisan way, and I just do not want us to blow that opportunity.

To the gentleman from Ohio (Mr. RYAN), I am so glad that you have joined us here. The gentlewoman and I are from Florida. I mean, it is like we are talking when we were in the State Senate together, because we were a part of helping Florida being able to advance itself as it relates to recovery.

But thank you for joining us.

Mr. RYAN of Ohio. I appreciate you carrying the load a little bit here while I was away.

One of the issues, and I do not think you have touched upon it just yet, is President Bush's decision to repeal the prevailing wage provisions that are normally intact in which anybody who would be working down in that area, the workers who would be down there getting paid, would get paid the prevailing wage of that area.

President Bush has rescinded that requirement; and so now there is talk of people going down there who will be making wages much, much less than the prevailing wage for Federal Government projects that live in that area.

So, in essence, these people who have been hit by the hurricane, who have been moved out to Baton Rouge or Houston or wherever, who want to go back to that community, go back to New Orleans and work, they are not going to earn the same wage that they would have earned had they been there before Katrina hit. And I just think this is kind of symbolic, or one example of what has been happening.

And you talked about some of the corruption. You talked about some of the contracts. This is absolutely ridiculous to tell these people who are trying to reconstruct their lives that they should not be making the prevailing wage of people who live and work in that community.

And, believe me, the money in the South is not that high of a wage. So it is not going to cripple the Government. This is Federal taxpayer money that is going down there. And what is happening is, in many instances, for the

rebuilding effort, and I was having a talk with some of the electrical workers tonight, basically what is happening is the wage is going to be so low it just has to go down to minimum wage.

So you have, say, a union electrician who is going to make \$20 to \$25 an hour. The union wage may be \$25; the prevailing wage may be \$20. So they would make \$20 on a Federal project. Well, if you eliminate and you rescind that regulation, that worker will make \$10 or \$15 an hour, maybe no benefits. It can go all of the way down to the minimum wage.

And what is happening now is that workers are looking at coming in from some of these other foreign countries, from Mexico, from some of these other countries. So the contractors who are getting the unbid contracts are going to start hiring foreign workers to come in for the rebuilding process and paying them a little bit above minimum wage, displacing workers who have lost their family who need to go back and rebuild.

Part of the reconstruction effort should be to try to get a little bit of money in the pockets of those people who want to go back and help rebuild the city. I mean, my goodness, that does not seem like too much to ask. I know many Americans feel like that. Even through a tragedy, and you want to go back, you should be working. Here are these people that want to go and actually work that are having their wages cut, and it just seems to me that is very shortsighted. It is, again, another bend in favor of the contractors, who, you know, have a job to do but not at the expense of everybody else.

You know, from the beginning here, and I am sure you have already touched upon all of the appointments of the members of FEMA in the upper echelon of FEMA, all political appointments, and we all understand that that happens, we are not trying to play dumb here. But give the guy an appointment who is not qualified, give him the ambassadorship to a country that has got a lot of beach front property. That is where you go. You do not put him in charge of FEMA. That is criminal what happened here.

You know, again, I do not how far you got in, but I think the main point from the past few weeks and the review of this was the administration saying, how are we supposed to know the levees were going to break? And we find out that last summer FEMA sponsored a simulation called Hurricane Pam, was the name of the simulation, and it brought a Category 4 or Category 5 hurricane up through New Orleans and what would happen.

Well, in July of 2004, the FEMA simulation said the levees would break, there would be flooding, millions of people displaced, and all of the tragedy that we watched on TV over the past couple of weeks was simulated to happen if New Orleans got hit by a Cat-

egory 4 or Category 5 hurricane. Then for the administration to come out and say how were we supposed to know is so disingenuous.

Then you look at FEMA. It is packed with political hacks, political appointees, an equestrian horse show organizer is supposed to be in charge of the most important emergency management organization in the country. I think it is criminal. I really believe it, and I choose that word specifically.

It is criminal because that shortsighted appointment led to people not getting the kind of treatment, the immediate response that was needed. We have been looking at this for a while now, over the past couple of weeks and have had a chance. You would just think, and I will yield here in a second, your job, what you should expect from your Government is that you pay taxes. And your taxes go, and some get wasted, just like in corporations or anything else. Some of the money gets wasted. But your money goes to FEMA, and you should have an expectation that the Federal Emergency Management Agency should be able to have a person in place that just deals with Hurricanes in the gulf, because there is a hurricane season every year.

So what happens if a hurricane hits New Orleans? We have hundreds of people employed here who make good money from the taxpayers. You have to meet your responsibility. So I feel like the President's appointments hurt.

I think the unbid contracts are continuing the process. The elimination of the prevailing wage is another slap in the face of those people who have been hurt and want to go back and actually work and earn enough money to rebuild their families and their communities.

I think this is continuing to go down the wrong road. I hope that some of what we are talking about here tonight brings that to light, and hopefully we can try to change it.

Listen, we want to work with the administration. We want these people to get help. That is why we are here. We are not here to demagogue. We are not here to beat up any one side or the other. But they are in charge, and they are not making the necessary changes that need to be made. Our constitutional responsibility, people send us here to do this, is to make sure that we keep those people in power in check. They do not seem to be listening, and they do not seem to be following some basic, I think, business procedures that would otherwise be implemented.

Ms. WASSERMAN SCHULTZ. The gentleman is absolutely right on point.

Your comments remind me of a question that our good friend, Doug Lyons from the South Florida Sun Sentinel, who I spoke to this morning, asked me. He said, he asked me if Michael Brown's resignation was enough. He said, now that we have got a successful, documented professional who will be at least, on an interim basis, running FEMA and making sure that the

disaster response to Katrina has an expert in charge, is that enough? You know, can we all breathe a sigh of relief, wipe our hands and go home?

I mean, the answer to that is just so absolutely not. The leader of FEMA is just the tip of the iceberg. I mean, when you ask any expert in emergency preparedness and disaster response if the one leader is the most important chink in the armor, they would of course say, no, it requires planning and preparation and budgeting and foresight and hindsight and a whole combination of expertise and planning that goes into preparedness and response.

□ 2130

So while it certainly was the right thing to do, and we are pleased to see that former Under Secretary Brown now did the right thing and stepped aside, there is so much left to be done. And going forward, while we can talk about what went wrong, we need an independent investigation and an independent commission that will be able to examine objectively so the American people have their confidence restored and that we know we have some competence and some deliberations going on about how we are going to deal with these kind of disasters in the future. We have got to talk about what comes next.

You watch the news every night, and now almost all the TV stations are allowing Katrina victims to list their cell phone numbers on national television because some of them are still looking for their kids. The National Center for Missing and Exploited Children, at least as of yesterday, said there were still 1,700 missing children reported from Katrina's aftermath: 1,700 children, 14 year olds, 12 year olds, 6 year olds, babies. There are babies that are still separated from their parents, from their moms.

We have got to do something going forward for these Katrina victims. We have got to make sure they have housing. We have got to make sure we get these kids back in school and we can get them back in school near or in the area that they originally lived in. And like the gentleman said, with the President's waiver of Davis-Bacon, which is the law that requires the prevailing wage be paid to workers, what incentive is there going to be for them to come back?

When you have the State of Israel, which commendably has offered scholarships for the college students that were displaced by Katrina, and we have Katrina victims going over, Jews and non-Jews going over to Israel now to accept scholarships, and the generosity of other countries, boy, does that say a lot about what we need to do to step up and make these residents whole again. We have got to ensure that a number of different things happen.

This is the 30-something Working Group. We have got a generation of people and young kids and our generation's children that are going to be in

dire need of their government's assistance. And if there is any time when it is imperative that the Federal Government engage, any point with any circumstance that there is an appropriate and vital role for the Federal Government, it is in response to a hurricane.

I am glad to see that the President today acknowledged finally, because it is really the first time I have heard him acknowledge, the possibility of a mistake. I am glad to see that he owned up at least in part to the possibility of there being problems, and it will be interesting to see what he says Thursday night when he speaks to the American people.

I hope what he says, we hope what he says is that there is going to be some drastic changes in our preparedness, in our response, in our funding, and in our priorities, because right now we are moving in the wrong direction.

Mr. RYAN of Ohio. If I may make a couple of points. I agree with the gentlewoman so much and this 30-something Group has really improved since the gentlewoman has gotten here.

I just want to make two points. One is the Davis-Bacon provision, the prevailing wage issue. Davis and Bacon were both Republicans, so this is not a Democratic issue. This is just something that seems to be fair. If Federal money is going to a certain area, they should pay the worker the wage that is prevalent in that area. That is number one.

And, two, and I know we have all talked about this, the disparity in income between those people in this country who have and those people who have not is tremendous. I hope that the good that we can derive from Katrina is that.

And, third, and the most specific point that I want to make, is that this has shown that our government has gone backwards as far as administration and execution; and we see it every day here.

We pass a prescription drug bill that is spending \$700 billion worth of the taxpayers' money and does nothing to allow for reimportation that would drive drug costs down or does not allow the Secretary of Health and Human Services to buy in bulk because the pharmaceutical industry has a stranglehold on this place. We do not see the proper reforms on distribution of health care. We do not see the proper investments in medical information technology that would help drive down the cost of medical care.

We have a school system that is based on a society that is agrarian, and kids are supposed to go home in the summer and work on the farm; and only three or four percent of the country still works in agriculture. These are things that are structural problems. And I think the FEMA issue just shows and highlights and puts the spotlight on it.

It is because there is money, and there is political appointments, and we have got to get our friends in, and we

have so many friends that gave us so much money that we even have to put some in FEMA, which probably should not have political appointments, but we have so many debts that we owe.

I have an uncle that I had a very interesting conversation with and he may be watching right now and I think my aunt is watching for sure who worked for Proctor and Gamble for God knows how many years. And we had a nice conversation one night about how this political body and political decisions are made every 2 years. We run very short-term political decisions that are made. The same in the business community. What are our next quarter profits going to be? Very short sighted. And I think we do not get the country back on the right track until those of us who are in this body are willing to make those long-term structural changes that need to be made to adjust the way government is administered in a 21st-century economy based on technology and knowledge.

That was the issue with FEMA. If we ran a Hurricane Pam situation in 2004, where was the breakdown in getting that information to those people who needed to actually make a decision once there was an actual hurricane in that area? What was the breakdown?

Until our government begins to run in an efficient way and in a way that is reflective of the communication abilities in the 21st century, the technological advancements, and everything else, we are going to be behind the eight ball whether it is FEMA, education, health care, whatever it may be. We have got to start making decisions that have a long-term impact on making our government run more efficiently. It should be able to run a heck of a lot more efficiently than it did in the 1930s and 1940s. And that is our job.

I really believe that the 30-somethings have a responsibility here because we grew up in an age that was much different than most of the people in here grew up in, with computers and technology and cell phones and now the ear pieces and what else is there. But we grew up in that different kind of scene than the echo boomers who are going up now, we have a responsibility to try to apply that technology to government. And I think my friend from Florida wants to be a part of that.

Mr. MEEK of Florida. Mr. Speaker, I always want to be a part of technology, but I can tell my colleagues that I am so glad they brought up the whole issue of Davis-Bacon and what the President did, many Americans did not understand what he did.

We talk about avoiding making the victims victims again. And we want them, and even some prominent Republicans have said, we want them to be able to have first swipe at the jobs that become available. But they will have a first swipe at the jobs at a lower paying rate than usually what the Federal Government provides to individuals carrying out federally funded work.

I think it is also important for us to realize that there are no parameters on

contractors that are down there trying to correct the problems that are there. So that means that the money saved on Davis-Bacon will go into the pockets of those individuals who are direct contractors of the Federal work.

Mr. RYAN of Ohio. Are we not using the same formula, the same administration processes that we used during the war and are using during the war. The same exact ones that we lost billions applying this system or using this system for the war, we are applying the same system now.

Mr. MEEK of Florida. The good thing I like about this 30-something Working Group is we always talk about second- and third-party validators and making sure that folks do not watch us here on the floor and think that we are talking out the sides of our necks. The Wasserman Schultz Report, the Ryan Report, the 30-something Report, the Meek Report. This is reality. The \$62 billion is the largest supplemental appropriations in history of this country outside of war; \$62 billion we did last week or the week before and the rest last week is the largest in history in the United States of America. So we have not been to this point ever.

I think it is also important for folks to understand the difference. Folks say, what is the difference between Democrat and Republican leadership? I will tell you this in the moment, this is fact, not fiction.

I am holding here a letter from the Democratic leader and several other ranking members that I mentioned earlier. Folks want to know the action. This is not on behalf of Democrats in Mississippi and Louisiana and Alabama. This is on behalf of Americans in those States. We are talking about the commitment to the South. We are talking about commitment to Americans that pay taxes every day, those that are veterans, those that are children of veterans, those that never fought in wars before, those that go to work every day, those individuals that are disabled and cannot go to work. We represent them.

Like it or not, we have to make sure as this Congress, because as the House we are the only branch of this government that must be elected to the position that they are in right now, including the President but the Vice President can very well, I am just saying as it relates to the legislative body, we are the only body that has to be elected by the people.

Mr. RYAN of Ohio. Article I, section 1.

Mr. MEEK of Florida. I thank the gentleman. I am glad he was present in constitutional law.

There is a letter right here to David Walker, the Comptroller General of the United States of America, Government Accountability Office. It is basically saying that we are asking for an anti-fraud commission to make sure that there is accountability in government contracting as it relates to Hurricane Katrina.

This is not just a letter just by the Democratic leader, the gentlewoman from California (Ms. PELOSI). Here we have the gentleman from California (Mr. WAXMAN) who is the ranking member of the Committee on Government Reform. He would be chairman if we were in the majority. We have the Democratic whip, the gentleman from Maryland (Mr. HOYER) who is the number two in charge of our efforts here on the floor. We have the gentleman from Minnesota (Mr. OBERSTAR) who is the ranking member of the Committee on Transportation and Infrastructure. We also have the gentleman from Mississippi (Mr. THOMPSON) who is the ranking member and would be chairman of the Committee on Homeland Security if we were in the majority here.

We have the gentleman from Wisconsin (Mr. OBEY), the ranking member of Committee on Appropriations. We have the gentleman from Michigan (Mr. DINGELL) who was once chairman of the Committee on Energy and Commerce that would be chairman if we were in control. We have the gentleman from California (Mr. GEORGE MILLER) who is also the ranking minority member as it relates to the Committee on Education and the workforce.

They are writing this to make sure that the largest appropriations outside of supplemental appropriations for a war, some \$62 billion are spent in the way that it is supposed to be spent so we do not make the victims victims over again.

I think all Americans, no matter where they may be, east coast, West, Midwest, South, this is their taxpayer money at work. So we know that Davis-Bacon, those rules and regs and that right that workers would have has already been swiped aside by the stroke of a pen, that you will receive a wage lower than any other Federal project that is out there because it has been waived at a time of natural disaster.

Will it save us money to be able to do more projects? No. Will it help the companies down there that are assigned the no-bid contracts, saying do the work, the sky is the limit, do what you do, bill us the way you want to bill?

One of the companies is under investigation right now as it relates to the Iraq contract. But better yet, they are given a contract, go down there, do as you may, we will do the paperwork later. But what we have done from the beginning are parameters on the American worker and those that are in the South.

Let me also add this: today, Democratic leader and also senior House Democrats, again, the list of individuals that are on the committees that are affected, have also requested an immediate establishment of a team of experienced auditors to monitor and also realtime contract and spending of the recovery effort.

This is what we are doing right now. If the majority side has done it, I com-

mend them; but I do not think that is the case now. So when I mentioned earlier on that we need to work in a bipartisan way, if we were working in a bipartisan way, this would not be a question of letters. It would be an issue of action. It would be, good, let us move on that idea. Let us make it happen.

That is the reason I believe that the chairmen, ranking members, and Members of this Congress should take time out and go down to the affected areas and see what is going on down there, and see poor individuals that are staying in New Orleans right now and staying in some of the affected areas in Gulfport, in Hancock County. Some watch TV and say, why do they not leave? Guess what? They cannot afford to leave.

□ 2145

They still today do not have the money to be able to get \$5 worth of gas.

I went down to see the gentleman from Mississippi (Mr. TAYLOR), our colleague, who is down there trying to not only help his constituents be able to receive some sort of Federal assistance or State assistance or trying to put boats back together so they can get back to work; he is a victim himself.

Earlier, I showed a picture of the Florida National Guard that is with us and the Congressman there on the other side of the colonel and myself. This is the Congressman's house, straight off the platform, not a brick left. So you want to talk about individuals being affected and not affected, all of us are touched by this, but we have to make sure that we show some level of leadership right now. This is why it is important that we make these recommendations.

We have Members of Congress that are trying, but we need individuals that are in the leadership that are willing to stand up. And I said it once before, and I will say it again, if we are ruffling feathers here tonight, so be it. Because last week we came to this floor putting great pressure on the administration and those that are in charge that have the pen stroking power to bring about a difference in the South, and we were in the light of saving lives. Now we are in the light of making sure that individuals are able to return back to their homes.

Our business here is very serious, and that not only letter writing but action is important. I think based on the action that has taken us this far, all the way back when we said if we can go in special session on the Schiavo case, if we can bring individuals before Congress and have congressional hearings and have special prosecutors for personal decisions that individuals have made in elected office, if we can come up here for far less, we can at least make sure the largest appropriations outside of the war supplemental, \$62 billion, that it has the oversight, not just because we want to have the gotcha factor. That is a lot of money, a lot of money that has been appro-

priated in a matter of 10 days, rightfully so.

I heard one of the esteemed, very prominent Members on the other side of the aisle, who took to the well right there and said, guess what, in \$50 billion, there is going to be wasteful spending. I had to kind of double take and rub my eyes and say, excuse me, am I sleeping? Am I dreaming?

I have a problem with wasteful spending of \$50 billion, but, guess what, that means a victim will not receive what they should receive, Americans will not get accountability of their taxpayer dollars and that we have accepted the fact that it is okay to waste money. I have got a problem with that, and I know we all do.

Ms. WASSERMAN SCHULTZ. Mr. Speaker, if you do not mind if I jump in, I want to just caution people listening tonight, our colleagues, our leadership, because when you have a disaster or anything of the proportion in size that Katrina was, it is hard to get your mind around it, especially if you have not been there. You now have direct, first-person ability to relay and understand the depth of what happened. Most of us have only seen the aftermath on TV.

The danger that we have in front of us is that with every passing day that Katrina's hitting is behind us, we are in danger of the American public and us as leaders becoming desensitized. The more it is on the news, the more we hear about it, the more we read about it, it is just the human psyche is such that you cannot have that raw nerve scratched every day and not steel yourself against it. With that desensitization, we are in danger of not having an appropriate response come out of this body, and we have got to come together.

We come here every week and we stand up and we point out our very clear differences with our friends on the other side of the aisle, but it does not have to be this way with the response to Katrina. There are some specific action items that can and should be done in order to prevent ourselves from becoming desensitized, not just as policy-makers but in the general populace as well.

We need the press. We should commend the press from the floor of this body for the spotlight that they have shown on these victims and their reality because, quite honestly, without that spotlight being shown by them, without their piling into the storm-ravaged area, see no evil, hear no evil, they would still be saying the same thing, and we would not have had the response and reaction that, quite frankly, we should have had right from the beginning.

So I want to commend the press and encourage them to continue to do it, but we have some action items that need to occur.

We need to get these people health care. We need to make sure they have access to Medicaid immediately. We

need to get them food stamp access. We need to make sure that they have access to education and housing and not just far-flung housing all over the country. If you lived in New Orleans, you do not need to resettle yourself permanently in Utah. That is not what we want to have a policy direct these people to. We want to bring them back. We want to set up transitional and then temporary housing and then eventually get them into permanent facilities, whether it is facilities that they have assistance from the Federal Government or whether they be given the ability to help them to make their own purchases of homes, which would be a wonderful thing to see.

That is what the leadership in this Congress is going to need to make happen. It is certainly going to be suggested by our side of the aisle. We need to make sure that we come together and suggest it on both sides of the aisle. The reconciliation process should be suspended. There are a number of things that should happen, and we are going to continue to talk about that.

Mr. MEEK of Florida. Mr. Speaker, I am sorry, we usually would have a closing statement here, but our time has run out. We will have, I understand, the first Democratic hour on Thursday.

Mr. Speaker, with that, we would like to thank the Democratic leader for allowing the 30 Something Working Group to come to the floor, and it was an honor to address the House once again.

RESPONSE TO HURRICANE KATRINA

The SPEAKER pro tempore (Mr. PRICE of Georgia). Under the Speaker's announced policy of January 4, 2005, the gentleman from Iowa (Mr. KING) is recognized for 60 minutes.

Mr. KING of Iowa. Mr. Speaker, I appreciate being recognized to have the opportunity to address the Speaker before this House.

This Nation has undergone the most serious natural disaster, the most costly natural disaster. Possibly not in the measure of lives but in the measure of treasure, it certainly has, and we pray for the recovery of those victims that are yet to be found. We pray that that number can stay as low as possible, and we know that, regardless of the number, each loss of life hurts and pains each family deeply.

This Congress has addressed Hurricane Katrina, done so quickly. We had a unanimous consent agreement after a conference call on Friday after the storm struck in its fury and the wind began to die down on Monday, the previous Monday. We appropriated \$10.5 billion, Mr. Speaker, and we did so under a unanimous consent agreement. We did that because we knew that we needed to get resources into the hands of the people who were saving lives, lifting people off of rooftops and pulling people out of houses and bringing

boats down through the communities, and we needed to make sure that the resources were there.

We needed to make sure that there was food, there was water, there was shelter, and this Nation watched on television as the disasters that were there brought people together in the Superdome, in the convention center, other locations around New Orleans, other locations around Alabama, Mississippi and, of course, other places in Louisiana.

This Nation has watched transfixed as we reacted and we deployed resources into the region and began to recover from this disaster. Each of us have different opinions about what was done right and what was done wrong, but Mr. Speaker, my position is that we are not done saving people. We are not done helping people get relocated. We are not done helping their lives get put back together, and they are not finished building for their future. Once that path is determined and once they start down that path and once we can see that we put a plan together that is going to help people get relocated, and at least in the short- and mid-term future, we will have seen to the needs of the many, many needy, then that will be time enough and plenty time enough for us to meet together in this Congress and to put together a chronological order of what happened, who knew what, why did they know it, what they did not know and why, what communications did they have, what decisions were made that impacted on the rescue operations and the recovery operations. What did they know and when did they know it, Mr. Speaker, is one way to ask that question and what did we learn from this disaster.

Time will come and that will be soon enough, and perhaps in this hour I will go back and talk about how I think we should put together the system here in Congress to take a good look at this, but, right now, we are recovering from this disaster.

Congress appropriated \$10.5 billion that Friday following the storm, and it was emergency spending. It was a special session, emergency spending money, \$10.5 billion. Our report was that FEMA was spending \$500 million a day. By the end of that day, the report was \$750 million a day. So that was a calculus to get us through Labor Day weekend, appropriate \$10.5 billion.

I asked for an accounting of that spending. It did not come early in the week. It did come later in the week, and the accounting came with the request for another \$51.8 billion, and the calculus for the \$51.8 billion was not readily available to us. The answer was simply we know we are going to spend more than another \$50 billion, so let us appropriate it.

So this Congress laid out a blank check, and in that appropriation there was a single line item. First, there was \$1.8 billion in there for the Department of Defense, and they spent a lot of money down there and poured a lot of

resources in. That is fine, but I believe the largest single line item ever passed in this Congress and appropriated without strings attached, without guidelines, without congressional direction was the \$50 billion that went to FEMA.

I asked for an accounting of that money. I wanted to know, first, how was FEMA spending, and now the number went from \$500 million a day to \$750 million a day to \$2 billion a day, and where was that money going. I happen to think in those terms of unit prices, how many meals, how much water, how much ice, how much fuel, how many rental units, how many people are on payroll, how many contractors are coming in that are contractors that are being paid, how do these contracts all add up, how does it divide out, how does it average out.

I thought it would be something that would be a calculation that one could track, and when I did get a look at those numbers, it had \$3.3 billion there for 200,000 trailer houses, 30,000 of which were available and 170,000 of which were back-ordered. So it is hard to define that \$3.3 billion as emergency spending when you spend the money to purchase a contract for future construction of trailer houses not available, and I say that is not emergency spending.

In addition, in the \$50 billion that came for the second appropriation there was another 100,000 trailer houses in there for the tune of \$1.6 billion. So now FEMA has had the authority apparently to purchase 300,000 trailer houses for the cost of \$4.9 billion, \$400 million of it will go for the 30,000 trailers, and that is rough numbers. Those trailers are available, but 270,000 trailers are back-ordered for a cost of about \$4.5 billion, declared and deemed to be emergency spending, the kind of thing that is going to help save lives, recover people, and, in fact, it took resources away that could have been better used in the recovery process.

In addition, in that appropriation there was \$650 million that was declared to be emergency spending, dedicated to mitigation of future disasters. Mitigation of future disasters cannot be characterized as emergency spending and cannot be characterized as something that helps disaster victims today in the gulf coast. It is money that could have gone to help people, but it is pigeon-holed. It is earmarked, and it is committed to other projects. We do not know what they are. Congress was not apprised of that, and yet we have an oversight responsibility.

All appropriations must start in this House of Representatives, Mr. Speaker, and those appropriations then flow through here over to the Senate and from the Senate then probably back, not often back to conference but to the President.

We start the appropriations process. The Founders were very clear in our responsibility and our duty here. You cannot spend money without the House of Representatives initiating this, and